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Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

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● (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the 111th meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

We gather today as we continue our study on the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We have two esteemed guests with us today. We have General the Honourable Roméo Dallaire and also, from Journalists for Human Rights, we have Rachel Pulfer, executive director.

General Dallaire served in the Canadian Forces between 1963 and 2000. From 1993 to 1994, he was appointed force commander for the United Nations assistance mission for Rwanda. He was also appointed to the Senate of Canada in 2005, where he served until 2015, and he's been an outspoken advocate regarding the responsibility to protect doctrine, genocide prevention, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder and veterans affairs.

Ms. Pulfer, we can have you lead off for 10 minutes, and then, General Dallaire, we can have you go after that. Then we'll open up the floor to questions from the members.

With that, Ms. Pulfer, if you're ready to begin, please proceed.

Ms. Rachel Pulfer (Executive Director, Journalists for Human Rights): First of all, thank you so very much for the opportunity. It's exciting to be here and a great honour to be sharing this desk with Roméo Dallaire.

[*Translation*]

My name is Rachel Pulfer. I am the executive director of Journalists for Human Rights.

[*English*]

JHR is an independent, non-partisan charity that works to strengthen media in conflict zones, developing countries, societies in transition, and other places where the sector is traditionally weak.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to share with the committee our view of the urgent human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC.

This presentation is based on the experience of our partners in the DRC and our network of journalists all over the country, as well as our recent conversation with Monsignor Marcel Utembi, head of the Congolese national bishops' conference, CENCO, during his visit to Canada.

I would like to share some recommendations that highlight areas for action, as well as help you understand the situation regarding the right to freedom of expression and how media development could support the Government of Canada's efforts to improve the situation.

[*English*]

I'd like to leave you more informed about the situation, with some recommendations grounded in the context for action. I also have some recommendations that show how media development could potentially contribute towards Canada's efforts to ameliorate the human rights situation in the DRC, at minimal cost and for maximum potential impact.

The situation of human rights in the DRC remains tenuous in the extreme, as I'm sure you are all very well aware. The number of refugees internally and externally displaced, caused by ongoing violence in the DRC, recently surpassed those of the Syrian refugee crisis, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council. Urgent action is recommended to forestall disaster.

In April 2018, the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office documented 493 violations of human rights in the country. This is a considerable step up from the 406 violations in March of this year. In the provinces suffering from armed conflict, notably North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, during the month of April, 66 people were killed by armed groups.

In Kasai, the Kamwina Nsapu armed uprising against government forces has caused thousands of deaths and displaced individuals across the country. Sources indicate that, in May, national armed forces and the militia, Bana Mura, killed approximately 250 people in retaliation to a Kamwina Nsapu uprising, of which 62 were children.

Since 2016, the DRC has faced an increasing number of violations of human rights and fundamental liberties and peaceful demonstrations have been violently repressed on an alarming basis. Tensions have increased and in January 2018, there have been violent repressions against demonstrations organized by the church, in particular. A recent report published in March 2018 by the mission of the United Nations in the DRC and the UN Joint Human Rights Office informs us that between January 2017 and 2018, 47 people, including women and children, have been killed by the security services and defence forces during demonstrations alone. Citizens have been attacked and arrested by state-backed intelligence agents, and opposition figures, like Moise Katumbi, former governor of Katanga province, have been forced into exile. The most recent example is the national deputy, Léon Mulumba, who was imprisoned for offending the head of state. Mulumba was sick and he was sentenced in his hospital room.

The implications of this situation on press freedom are significant. The population of the DRC is continually deprived of its right to information and on numerous occasions, access to the Internet has been cut. This is done to quell dissent and to prevent the organization of peaceful demonstrations on social media platforms. Many media outlets close to the opposition have been closed, in spite of measures to ease tensions put in the accord of December 2016. Journalists have been intimidated, arrested, and harassed. In this year alone, the organization, Journaliste en danger, based in Kinshasa, registered 44 cases of violations against press freedom. In Kasaï-Central, since April of this year, a dozen journalists have been attacked and intimidated by government authorities. On May 19, in Kinshasa, one journalist named Christine Tshibuyi was kidnapped, after covering a funeral of a young militant.

In such an environment, journalists self-censor out of fear of reprisal. As the electoral period approaches, we fear that the human rights situation in the DRC is becoming critical.

In this particular situation, what can Canada offer and what does Canadian media development offer, in particular? Journalists for Human Rights has been working in the DRC for 10 years.

› We work by sending journalism trainers to work side by side with local journalists on a form of tough, hard-hitting accountability journalism that emphasizes local human rights issues and catalyzes locally led and sustainable solutions to local problems. This is especially valuable and relevant in fragile environments where the authority's capacity to act on behalf of its constituents is compromised, and where press freedom exists but is under threat, such as in the DRC.

How can this help in a constructive way? I'll give you an example. JHR has been working in the DRC for the past several years, and in 2016 we convened the first-ever national forum for media in the DRC. The goal was to bring journalists together to make common cause and protect one another against common threats.

Three weeks after the forum ended, we had to do exactly that. The president of the Kikwit chapter, Badylon Kawanda, was investigating a political disappearance at the provincial office of the Agence nationale de renseignement, which is the DRC version of the CIA. He was beaten up so badly he had to be hospitalized. The entire network publicized this incident, and I wrote an op-ed in *The Globe and Mail* about this problem. Two weeks later, the *chef de sécurité* for the local office came to Kawanda's radio station in person to apologize for the poor behaviour of his subordinates. He gave his word that it would not happen again, and Kawanda has continued his powerful work unharassed since that point. The *chef de sécurité* cited media pressure, both local and international, as the main reason for his action.

When it comes to transformational change for communities, JHR-trained journalists in DRC have been putting local issues on the agenda and catalyzing positive change. In another example, we trained local journalists, highlighting the plight of the hearing impaired in Matadi, Bas-Congo province, making the argument that the hearing impaired were left out of the public dialogue because there was no sign language interpretation on state television. After the features ran on a local network, the governor of Bas-Congo province announced that he would be launching a school for the hearing impaired, which he subsequently did, and he directed that sign language interpretation be included in all coverage on state television, in a failed state, through a violent election.

Further, and germane in light of the recent Ebola outbreak, JHR-trained journalists have played a powerful role in ensuring the flow of information and combatting misinformation during the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone and Liberia. One JHR journalist, Kolubah Akoi, was given an African Union humanitarian award for his work in ensuring that Liberians in Lofa County, the epicentre of the outbreak in Liberia, understood how to seek medical help, what to avoid, and how to bury their dead safely.

These outcomes were achieved and are achieved in a particularly cost-effective and efficient manner. The average JHR trainer works with a minimum of 20 journalists during their time in-country, and these journalists have, on average, an audience reach of approximately 20,000 people or more. The actual impact of any development dollars invested in media is exponentially greater than the number of people directly trained, a phenomenon known in media development circles as the media multiplier effect. This is not to mention the impact that expert trainers from Canada can have in clarifying the need for Canadian action internationally on human rights in the DRC while reporting on these stories to large audiences at home in Canada.

This is particularly germane now, at a time when the human rights situation in the DRC is worsening by the day. Local authorities and institutions are compromised, and bilateral and multilateral actors feel paralyzed to act in the face of these extraordinarily complex and dangerous situations.

In the current environment, working with local and international media is one of the only reliable ways that external actors can exert internal pressure and help local communities and civil society generate positive change for themselves. Let's be honest; none of us moved in a significant way on the Syrian crisis until we saw that photo of Alan Kurdi on the beach in the Mediterranean. International journalists can put a crisis on the international map, and local journalists can create local awareness of human rights issues and propose local solutions, all for a fraction of the cost of other forms of intervention in an environment where institutions are severely compromised to accept, let alone channel, bilateral aid effectively. Working with journalists will build the internal feedback loops required to bring about that positive change and help the Congolese to help themselves.

I have some key recommendations. With a view to improving the situation of human rights in the DRC, we recommend that Canada lend its voice and weight to the following points: that Canada continue its robust support for credible and transparent elections; that Canada push for elections to be organized for and take place in December 2018 as recommended by the agreement signed under the aegis of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo, also known as CENCO; that the current head of state not be involved in these elections, as required by the constitution of the DRC; that Canada also advocate support for fair, free, and credible elections at the UN Security Council; and in line with Security Council Resolution 1325, that Canada promote women's roles as peace builders in this process.

● (1310)

We also recommend that in the absence of functioning public institutions and a weakened civil society, the Canadian government consider prioritizing support for media development organizations operating in the DRC. We also recommend that Canada call for commitment from various political actors, opposition and majority, not to promote hate speech.

Canada's reputation as an honest broker for bringing a coalition of partners to the table has translated into an international leadership position for Canada for media in the DRC. It is one that we, at JHR, would like to build on through leveraging Canada's full potential as a future global leader in media development.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you all today. I look forward to answering your questions.

● (1315)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Pulfer.

Now we're going to move to General Dallaire.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Roméo Dallaire (Founder, Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to be in this place, speaking to a House of Commons committee. Given our country's sound system of governance, I place a lot of faith in the work and recommendations of parliamentary committees. They help shape government policy and open the government's eyes to the problems that need fixing, often in relation to the bigger picture.

[*English*]

I am coming to you as an ex-force commander of a UN force way back in 1994, right on the border with, of course, the Congo. I was involved in 1996 when Canada was there looking at how we were handling nearly two million refugees in the eastern Congo, due to the Rwandan crisis, and the extensive actions taken by the extremist *génocidaires* who did escape from Rwanda but were conducting operations inside Rwanda.

In 1998 I was monitoring the Ugandan, Rwandan, and other countries' invasion and change of government at the time. Then in 2011, a full documentary team went in with me when we looked at the use of children in this conflict, so in both the Kivu, which are the eastern provinces, and Ituri, which is just north of the east. We were in Uganda, where Joseph Kony was operating beyond his borders and influencing the Congo, but also we were in the DRC and we were in South Sudan. The whole region was being affected, and the whole region was using refugees, but also children, in their conflicts.

As founder of the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative, we have received recently a project from UN peace ops to go into Somalia, where I already have people in, and the Congo, where we're returning, in order to assist the government forces in changing the nature of their ethos in regard to the use of children as instruments of war, and in so doing, help them write their doctrine and produce training that is professional and capable of making them conscious that children are not there as a weapon of war, nor will they ever win a war. They will sustain wars, but they won't win them.

You are aware, of course, of Ebola now breaking out again, and we faced Ebola when we were in Sierra Leone with my Dallaire initiative, and we had to break for about eight months. But we discovered how the proper training of police forces and the military, the security forces, were able to save a lot of the children who would have been abandoned had they not been made conscious of the fact of the vulnerability of children.

Lastly, we are in a business where it is not cultural frameworks that make children more acceptable to be used and abused, particularly in their human rights, be it through child labour, child prostitution, or child trafficking. Because they are youth and in those societies young people are seen to be of an adult status, even as young as 13, we are being held back in any way of imposing on those societies changes of culture in regard directly to child rights. That is to say, anyone under the age of 18 is a child, as the UN defines it. Therefore, a 13-year-old girl who is pregnant is not somebody's wife; she is a 13-year-old girl who is pregnant. As well, a 14-year-old boy who is carrying a weapon and being used as a soldier is a 14-year-old boy and not an adult soldier.

That is the construct in which we are working, and that is maybe a harder perspective in regard to how we are going to effect human rights and change the nature of people's thinking, as an example, on the use of children and the abuse of their human rights in a population that often reaches up to 50% under the age of 18, which is an astronomical reference in regard to the population spread and the availability of children.

● (1320)

I will leave my text, if I may, for your leisure, and I'll touch upon some of the material.

I've also brought some material. This is a storybook of our research in the Congo on Congolese children about what they've been involved in as children used as weapons of war. We use that to educate them and train them, and to also educate the forces. There's also some work we're already doing in Rwanda in regard to eliminating the use of child soldiers.

Yes, I'm an ex-soldier and a force commander, a Senator and a colleague, maybe a bit of a humanitarian, but I'm also a grandfather. In so being, I don't think that the abuse—and massive abuse—of children in conflict zones is, in fact, a sideline activity. It is a mainstream concern in regard to conflicts around the world. There isn't one conflict in the world that doesn't use massively, and in central roles, children under 18 in all capacities to sustain these conflicts.

The Congo is an ideal example of that massive abuse by government forces, which have now been released from being held accountable—that is, held as a witness—in front of the international community because they've officially stopped recruiting child soldiers, but there are a number of children recruited in a variety of capacities, not only gun to gun, but all the way through to porters and girls. Up to 40% of the girls are being used as sex slaves and bush wives, and non-state actors are still using them extensively.

As recently as last week, I met with the NGO community working out of Goma, which is the core of the eastern Congo, the east conflict zone where the UN mission has deployed its headquarters, and it's right on the Rwandan border. They articulated once again that, although people are using children less often, they use them less often when they don't need them; that is to say, when there's no threat in their area. The minute a threat appears or the minute any friction appears, the recruitment of children is immediately launched. They're the easiest and fastest mobilization base, the most effective in regard to bringing them into the fold and getting them to conduct operations that adults won't do, because their brains are often not developed enough to know the difference between extreme risk and empathy for other human beings.

We have been involved extensively in this massive abuse of the human rights of children for nearly 12 years now, but have done research way back, even in 2005, on how they're recruiting children, why they're recruiting children, and how we can counteract that. The child soldiers initiative has built a capacity to go now inside the country and start retraining and re-educating their forces and also their police forces—not only military—in regard to not using children.

Without effective training, peacekeepers, soldiers, and police will face child soldiers and will either under-react, overreact, or not react at all, leading to a situation that can be catastrophic for all involved, from the peacekeeper to the child. We have seen forces, such as in the Central African Republic, where South African soldiers were surprised by child soldiers and, before they were able to react, 13 of them were killed—not child soldiers but soldiers.

Unless there is an introduction of a whole new capacity in building an operational capability in forces to handle child soldiers without necessarily using lethal force, but infusing new doctrinal changes, new tactics—because it's a new way of war—you will continue to sustain casualties on the children where kinetic force is used extensively versus ulterior uses of capabilities. New tactics could reduce the possibility of escalation to kinetic, but also produce scenarios by conducting operations that are not directly related to destroying children where the children could escape, and in fact, create scenarios where they can escape in the confusion of combat.

● (1325)

Ultimately, we're working to try to convince people to prevent their recruitment, and that is by building forces that are far more aware of what they are able to do. In so doing, the work we're doing is not in isolation but it has become quite a national construct in our international development and also in our foreign affairs through a whole new championing of child rights up front. This means it's not human rights, it's not women's rights, but it's children's rights that are up front.

If you are able to reduce the use of children, and if you're able to convince people that using children is inappropriate in conflict, you are getting people around the table with a safe subject: children. As you move that yardstick of getting the people to discuss, as an example, let's stop recruiting them under 13, because they recruit them as young as eight, and bring them to the table to reduce their mobilization base, you'll get them to talk. You will get the belligerents to discuss, and you will look at other opportunities to show good faith. Ultimately, if we get it all the way up to under 18, then all the more for it.

First of all, there's the championing of child rights up front as an instrument to prevent their recruitment, and in so doing, train people to recognize them in their policies. Only 10 out of 180 mandates out of the UN over the last 10 years even mentioned the word "child", let alone how to protect them.

That's the first element. I have a text that I'll leave you with regard to a definition of child rights up front. However, when we talk about the abuse of children, we're directly talking about the abuse of women and children at large. For child soldiers are not only locked in to being used in a gun-to-gun format, but they're used to abuse the whole population, to create fear through horror, through use of horrific instruments like rape. In so doing, child soldiers can be pushed to an extreme where we will argue, and have argued in research, that the recruitment of child soldiers is a first sign, an early warning indicator, of the possibility of mass atrocities that will grow in that country and ultimately even degenerate into genocide.

In every one of the conflicts we've seen where child soldiers have been recruited, the scenario has degenerated ultimately into mass atrocities and abuses of women, sexually and otherwise, and children in the same way.

The second element is understanding that wars have changed. We're into civil wars, ethnic conflicts, situations where imploding nations and failing states exist. Your normal references, your moral references, have broken down, and in so doing, the use of children as child soldiers by some factions seems to be logical, but it is dead against the International Criminal Court where recruiting children as child soldiers in any capacity, from sex slaves to simply carrying water, by any faction, is a crime against humanity. It's a war crime.

Getting the troops to recognize that and report it and intervene in that sense, and getting the international community to recognize that these wars such as in the Congo have been sustained by the fact that they're recruiting children.... The minute the scenario changes, they massively abuse children by recruiting them, and in so doing, change the nature of the conflict within days.

The third element is Canada's efforts in this regard in two arenas that can have a direct impact on the Congo because we're going in there with this in mind, and also with the support of the African Union.

● (1330)

That is the Vancouver principles, which are principles on how to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and also the Elsie project, with the concept of introducing force multipliers in the forces that are being deployed by encouraging forces to recruit women and put them in the front lines. Children in conflict react differently to women as they see them. Even if they're in uniform, there is a significant difference. Also, women bring new dimensions of communicating with the communities, with different factions of the communities that men can't even get close to.

That force multiplier is a significant factor, in our estimation, of reducing the value of child soldiers, because we will neutralize them. I don't want to use the military term "neutralize", which means "destroy", but "neutralize" meaning "render ineffective the use of children". The more we can be effective in facing them with our security forces and with the application of things like child rights up front, the less they will be useful to those who want to recruit them. They will ultimately even become a liability, because those who do recruitment will be sent to jail by the International Criminal Court.

We're doing the indirect approach. We're not doing frontal assaults on them. We're taking them by training better security forces, police forces, national forces, and changing their concept of how they look at children.

Children under 18 are not instruments of war. They're not to be abused in their rights to be children. Of the six grave violations of children that have been introduced by the UN, the gravest one, graver than child trafficking, and graver than even the use of children in areas of abuse such as mines and the like, is the use of children as instruments of war. All the rest fall flat when you're faced with children used as weapons of war.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General.

We're going to move right to questions and begin with MP Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guests for being with us today.

I want a comment from both of you on the election readiness and the likelihood of elections taking place. You've been there. In our conversations we've had here on whether this country can move forward, the key seems to be whether they're able to pull off the election.

You're working on election readiness and those kinds of things. Can you comment a bit on that? Is it likely to go ahead? Are we going to be successful, or is it going to be one more delay and failure?

Ms. Rachel Pulfer: That's a very good question, very apropos.

The forum that I cited in my remarks was organized in February of 2016. At that point, we thought we were gearing up for elections in November of that year. We're now in May of 2018. The narrative is that there will be elections in December.

The expectation from our networks of journalists and from Archbishop Utembi is that those elections will be a sham, that Kabila will be essentially functioning in some way as a principle presence. That is why I wanted to stress that Canada should support a position where the current head of state is not involved, as required by the DRC's constitution.

What we anticipate is that if elections go ahead, there will be a proxy for Kabila elected. That is something that we in the international community should be monitoring for and guarding against.

Mr. David Anderson: Do you believe the election process itself can be done fairly, or is it unlikely? They can put a proxy in and they control the levers of power, but can the election be run properly there or not?

Ms. Rachel Pulfer: I do believe that is possible, but I believe it will take a significantly greater emphasis being put on this process by the international community than we've seen to date.

Hon. Roméo Dallaire: If we run a bit scared of letting some of these processes go, even with failings—that is, the process of democracy—we're not going to get to first base in any of these countries. We're going continue to see them degenerate.

Faced with this challenge, this election—and we've seen it in other places—the more that the international community engages directly, and harangues, and gets involved, and visits, and commits itself to wanting to see an election, the more it will happen. There is an impact on the violence side with all those witnesses around. Pouring in witnesses, pouring in efforts to do it, but deliberately, and not simply verbal, will give you a better chance than saying, "Gee, you know, we don't think it will work, and we'll let it ride."

That is exactly what the opposition wants. I lived it in Rwanda. Everybody stayed away, and the whole place went up in smoke because nobody came and nobody really cared.

● (1335)

Ms. Rachel Pulfer: Sunlight is the best disinfectant in the Congo as elsewhere.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you.

I want to talk with you a bit about the structure of the media in the Congo. I was reading in an article this morning that there is some frustration in the United States that the United States government hasn't spent more money on establishing protocols that would actually protect and develop methods of circumvention of the restrictions that governments put in on electronic media. Can you talk a little about that in the Congo?

You said the government shut down the Internet and different things. Do we need to do more to circumvent those kinds of authoritarian clampdowns on communication, and if so, what can we do?

Ms. Rachel Pulfer: We have an interesting situation in that we are funded in the DRC by the National Endowment for Democracy, the project manager of which is not allowed to visit the Congo. He is denied a visa every time he applies. The last time I was in the DRC, I decided to visit the national museum on the last day. I thought it would be a quiet visit and I was verbally attacked by members of the presidential guard who accused me of being an agent of the CIA.

That is the type of environment we're talking about. When we were coordinating that initial forum, it was touch and go as to whether the forum was going to happen, whether we were going to be shut down. The linchpin was that our ambassador at the time, Madame Ginette Martin, all four-foot-nothing of her, showed up at that forum and made it clear that the international community, to General Dallaire's point, was watching and paying close attention to what was happening to journalists as a strong, leading indicator of the bellwether of democracy in that country.

When it comes to the kinds of concerns you're citing, I would encourage more intervention, not less, more scrutiny and a robust process that is tracking some of these issues and showing how the government is manipulating Internet access in order to achieve its goals.

There have been egregious abuses of journalists, journalists who have been killed and disappeared, and these issues are not getting the attention of the international community in the way they should.

Mr. David Anderson: May I ask you a question? We're going to run out of time here way too soon.

In Canada, we've moved away from some of the older methods of communication and people are onto newer ones. What do you find in these countries? What is the main communication method?

Our information is that there are lots of radio stations and lots of TV stations, but many of them are very poor and don't have the resources. Where are people getting their information, and is it effective for the government, then, to be shutting down the electronic media?

Ms. Rachel Pulfer: A lot of people get their information from social media platforms that they access in a variety of ways. There is a lot of misinformation that circulates on social media platforms, which is one of the things that our programming works to mitigate against. Radio remains king for rural Congo and you can still get information out through radio stations, but for example, in Goma, when the M23 rebels invaded the city in 2012, all the stations were playing music. That was the way that the stations were controlled.

We had a partnership with the *National Post* and ScribbleLive. We trained our journalists on how to use ScribbleLive technology to get information out to an international audience about what was happening in Goma at that time, which then filtered back to the DRC. It is fundamental that people understand the way in which that government is manipulating these levers in order to facilitate this ongoing campaign of disinformation and a reign of terror. I cannot stress the urgency of that enough.

Mr. David Anderson: I'm not sure if I'm running out of time, but I suspect I might be.

The Chair: Yes, you are out of time.

We're now going to move to MP Tabbara, please.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. Thank you both very much for being here.

General Dallaire, thank you very much for your contributions to the UN and to Canada. We salute you for that.

In regard to my question, I'm reading an article here entitled, "Children 'voluntarily join' armed groups in DR Congo". There is a quote in it that says:

> The recruitment of children, even if not forced, nonetheless appears to arise less out of a desire (to join) than a choice made within a limited set of socio-economic options.

Further down it says:

> Poverty, unemployment, hunger, and violence are some of the main issues driving children to join militia groups in those regions.

There was a study conducted that this article talks about.

As you know, the Congo is Africa's biggest producer of copper, the largest source of cobalt and other minerals such as coltan, and so on, and we don't see any of those minerals and resources going to its people. We're seeing the use of child soldiers in this conflict. It's the biggest conflict since World War II. Where can we see an end to this?

Where can we see some of these very rich resources going to its population, to its civilians, so that we can decrease or eliminate child soldiers in this region that is vastly rich with resources?

● (1340)

Hon. Roméo Dallaire: Your researchers are doing lovely work. We monitor that, as you do, of course, because of our research work and the fieldwork.

The first thing is that, as you alluded to and the article explains, there's no such thing as a volunteer child soldier. In this country, people volunteer to join the military because it's an arm of the government that's doing work for it. In countries in conflict, children will gravitate to it because there's nothing else. The family's been destroyed. There's no work, socio-economics.... They've been sold off to forces. It's the only place where they think they might have protection.

In a lot of the prevention work we're involved with, we're educating children not to get sucked in by promises of education and a better life, as you've seen with ISIS, by joining non-state actors in becoming child soldiers. The volunteerism is not a clear volunteerism. It's under duress. As such, it's a term we have to be very, very cautious with.

Their movement, however, toward those organizations comes from the points you have raised: where is the distribution of wealth, where is the employment, and what do we do with that? We're in the business of getting kids out of being used and/or preventing them from being used. When we get them out of these and we hand them over to people like UNICEF to then rehabilitate and reintegrate—because that's my business—our concern is the re-recruitment of the children.

After they've spent three months in rehabilitation to be a cobbler, in a country where they don't wear any shoes, then they all of a sudden look around and see there's nothing for them, well, what do they do? They are easily preyed upon to be re-recruited, and the cycle starts over again. The follow-through is not the fact that there's not enough money going into rehabilitation and reintegration. It is the fact that the construct of the society around it has not stabilized, and they have no other options available to them once they demobilize.

What is crucial is making them ineffective, if they recruit them. If they're useless, if all they're doing is eating their food, and they can't use them because we have found ways and tactics to make them ineffective, if their operational capabilities are kept at such a low level because they can't train them to a higher level to actually win something or to gain something, if we can continue to move that, we will then make them ineffective and they won't be recruited by the non-state actors or hard-liners because they'll be ineffective, useless to them, and a liability.

How you handle them after that remains the world of the NGO community. I have to tell you that since Graça Machel, the widow of Nelson Mandela, did her major study in 1996, all those years we spent billions on rehabilitation and reintegration, a lot of kids have been killed while being used, but that hasn't reduced the numbers of child soldiers. Only if we get into the front end, where we're working and changing the nature of what it is to be a child soldier and the nature of how the security forces face them, and we make them ineffective, only then are we seeing the reduction. We're already reducing the number of al Shabaab kids in Somalia through our work, because they're seeing it as a no-win.

Yes, pick up on the socio-economics. Yes, go after the extraction industry. Go after, maybe, even the Chinese government, which is building roads to only the extraction industry sites and not where the population needs the roads. I have no problem with going after those things, but what you cannot ignore is the fact that, unless you break the back of the whole of the security scenario in which children are being used as instruments of war, you will not end the war.

We call it "generational war". We have girls in the Congo who have been recruited very young and have had children. Their children are now fighting as child soldiers. We create generational wars by using kids.

Go after all that other stuff, but give assets to change the nature of the conflict itself by changing the tactics and the use of children.

● (1345)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. Roméo Dallaire: Sorry for the long answer.

The Chair: That was a good answer.

We now have MP Hardcastle, please.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you.

I could listen to this all day. I hate these interruptions of the questions.

I'm going to give you a couple of points and let the two of you take up the rest of my time. I'm intrigued to hear more about what you see as the role of women. I'd like to hear more statistically about the current status of the International Criminal Court end.

I'd also like to hear more about child soldiers and the issue of children up front. How can we position ourselves in the international community to make child soldiers more of a liability? It seems like we have a good opportunity, but how can we foster an environment where that arises more quickly?

You can use my time on any of those matters. Thank you.

Hon. Roméo Dallaire: I hope your time is half an hour.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Rachel Pulfer: I'll respond to the point about the role of women, because that's very close to my heart.

One of the points to stress in this is that Canada should also seriously consider a gendered approach to human rights work in the DRC, mindful that women and girls are often disproportionately at a disadvantage in any of these given societies. General Dallaire laid out the scenario of women who then have children who then rejoin these armies.

One of the tropes of JHR's work is that we prioritize training women to go into positions of leadership in newsrooms, into positions where they're anchoring newscasts, and into situations where it is normalized that women are leading a public conversation about a given issue.

This has been particularly valuable, as we have seen in South Sudan, in a scenario of conflict. Most recently we have worked with a woman named Anna Nimiriano. She is now editor-in-chief of the *Juba Monitor*, the most influential newspaper in the country, and she is setting the public agenda for all the radio stations in terms of how this dialogue is being discussed in the country. That is critical, because she is prioritizing issues over actors. She is making sure that the focus of the conversation around the conflict is, how do we resolve issues like the issue of child soldiers? How do we address and resolve these problems, as opposed to tracking the one up, one down, who's in, who's out, Paul Malong kinds of issues that the conflict has seen to date.

We have found that when we put women into those positions, that's what happens. They prioritize children's rights, the issues of child soldiers, concerns regarding girls' access to education, and even garbage collection—all the basic developmental needs that are neglected in a situation of conflict and fragility.

Hon. Roméo Dallaire: In 2005, I was Prime Minister Martin's lead into Darfur, and Senator Jaffer was with me. There was something called a comprehensive peace agreement between Sudan and Darfur that was trying to solve that problem. What we discovered in the peace agreement was that there was no mention of women or children—no women, no children—and not only not mentioned, but not even as part of the process.

Today, we're still facing significant elements where children or women are just not even part of the equation. When I speak of child rights up front, it comes down to what the priorities are to try to move a country to peace. How do you manage that process from conflict towards peace?

It's always been very much at the high level: men between men, big armies, and so on, and security, and diplomats and the like. Yet the nature of the conflict being civil wars, imploding nations, failing states, massive abuses of human rights of women and children and so on, those are the levels in which the conflicts are being played out and they are often not even part of the mandate, let alone the concept of solution or concept of operations. In so doing, you don't get a result. You just get a lot of administration, stalling, and holding it up at the high level.

We believe you can attrite these conflicts by going down into things like child rights, a peace and security agenda, a women's peace and security agenda, children's rights up front. You actually build your concept of operations for the security forces, as the military and so on, on this. Where would kids be that would make them vulnerable? How do we retrain those forces to be able to extract the kids and get at the kids without simply killing them? It goes on and on.

The more you are able to concentrate on that level, the more the mobilization base for those who want to keep the fight going, gets attrited and reduced. It's incredibly distressing that those who are the victims, and those who are being used as perpetrators, are actually never—or nearly never—mentioned in mandates and in concepts of operations, yet there's the source of your continued ability to sustain the conflicts.

I think that the liability side of child soldiers.... We, at the request of the chief prosecutor of the ICC, wrote her concept of how to prosecute people who recruit child soldiers. We've written it and presented it to the 100-odd countries that have joined in. It is now being used, and they're now prosecuting.

One of the new angles that are also being introduced is how you protect the children who are being interrogated, and how to protect them against the defence lawyers, of course. We're seeing cases where there isn't enough prosecution, of getting at the bad guys, because they can't get the sexual abuse side of the house defended enough to be able to be prosecuted. There's work to be done at the ICC in order to give it the tools to be able to protect the children and get the information.

One of the reasons for the Vancouver principles was to have security forces know what to look for. Soldiers and policemen don't necessarily report on children in a conflict zone. If you don't report on children and you don't report on abuses of children—it's just something that happens—you don't get the hard data you need to be able to prosecute the bad guy who's perpetrating that.

Educating the security forces to know what to look for and how to report it and how to make it stand for prosecution has been part of the Vancouver principles that we've been working on, and with significant enforcement.

I would like only to end on the women's side of the house. We've had women be able to communicate in the community and convince the men to stop recruiting children. We've had women who have been able to talk to women and have tea with them and converse with them—whereas men cannot even get close to that—and then they influence the men in the community to stop using child soldiers.

● (1350)

Here is an example. I was in South Sudan, and the governor there said, "I'm very proud because I'm stopping Joseph Kony from coming in and recruiting and stealing our kids because we've created local defence forces." The Congo has just done that also. It has created community defence forces. He said, "We'll protect our children," and so on.

When we went to see the makeup of the defence forces, more than half of the defence forces were kids. We said, "You have a willingness to stop the use of kids, yet you're using kids." The response was, "Well, yeah, they're the ones available, you know," and so on.

When the women start telling the men, "Hey, dummy, these are children. You don't use our children for this. Get the men out," and so on, that can be a significant factor. That's why women are critical. They have a significant impact in the communities that men don't.

When people tell me that a male military observer for the UN and a female military observer for the UN are the same.... When you ask the men, that's the answer you get, but when you ask the women, you can see that there is a spectrum of new capabilities that they can bring to the conflict in these types of conflicts, which are civil wars, imploding nations, and abuses of human rights. These are human dimension exercises.

I think that Canada, as a leading middle power—and I'll get back to the point about the United States, you know, from earlier on—doesn't want the United States, necessarily, to lead. Canada should be leading, and Germany should be leading, and Sweden. We should be going in, not with the heavy boots of massive powers, but in fact, with the flexibility and the ability to adapt that countries like Canada have.

Canada's not having a seat and Canada's not being at the forefront of peacekeeping is taking a massive leadership role away from peacekeeping and innovative solutions.

● (1355)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think we have time for one more question.

MP Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): We'll start with....

Did you have...?

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): I did.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

Thank you very much for your very compelling testimony today.

I have a short question, and hopefully we can find some time for MP Fragiskatos, as well.

In late March of this year, there was news that the Government of the DRC was refusing to accept international dollars for help with setting up its elections. We know that the elections have been delayed already. What I'm really wondering is whether you think there will be further delays in the elections. If there's no international intervention that is being allowed by the government at this point, how can Canada provide that assistance to have that peaceful transition of government?

Hon. Roméo Dallaire: My short answer is that I really don't believe that we take these conflicts and these frictions at the level of seriousness that they are. These are human beings like us, and they're being destroyed and abused by the hundreds of thousands and by the millions. We're seeing it. They're just like us. If a nation is imploding and we have the capability to influence it.... We have the responsibility to protect doctrine that we brought to the UN in 2005, and it says that if there are massive abuses of human rights in a country by the government, or if the government can't stop it, we have the responsibility to go in and protect the civilians—not change the regime, but protect the civilians.

Our fear of operationalizing and of committing to humanitarian missions—be it fear of casualties or fear of making a mistake—is holding back the ability to move these countries forward. They're screaming to move forward, but there's no way they can do it alone, unless countries like ours—middle powers—can take a leadership role, and I mean a real leadership role, not just going in with a couple of diplomats. Get in there with big guns.

I don't literally mean big guns. I mean ministers. Gee, I have to watch it. I'm an ex-soldier.

Thank you.

Ms. Rachel Pulfer: Just to pick up on that, one of the things we've seen in South Sudan that I discussed prior to our intervention there with Nicholas Coghlan, our ambassador there—fabulous guy — was media development. This is one of the ways we can effectively create internal pressure loops on those authorities and internal feedback loops to ensure that some of the individuals in authority in the Congo actually move on these different files.

What we saw in South Sudan was a hopeless situation when we went in. It looked like every NGO was initially going to be taxed with a $10,000 tax just operate in the country. We went in, and the president was on record calling for people to shoot journalists for reporting against the state. A day later a journalist was shot in the back.

Fast forward three years. The media authority committed at a forum organized by the Canadian government and Journalists for Human Rights to uphold the media laws and ensure that media and journalists could practice their craft safely and securely. That's Canadian action and leadership in South Sudan.

In DRC when we convened that forum, that was Canadian leadership leading media development in the Congo. The following week I met with the head of the *volet*, the French attaché who coordinates millions of dollars of media development in the DRC.

He said, "I don't get it. You've organized this forum, you have coverage across the country as well as internationally. There's a national commitment now amongst journalists to support one another against situations of threat, and we weren't even involved." I said, "Yes, well, you were invited." He said that this puts Canada in a unique leadership position because we're not regarded in that environment as an imperial presence. We are regarded as a middle power, an honest broker who can form these coalitions and create action.

When governments say that they're not going to accept aid or assistance in order to facilitate elections, that's a bluff. It's up to us to call that bluff.

● (1400)

Hon. Roméo Dallaire: We don't even come close to achieving or overstepping the bounds of our potential. We're still shooting well below our potential and what the developing countries expect of us, particularly in Africa.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: General Dallaire, in the little time that's remaining, I want to ask you—and it follows up with your previous comment—about paths to peace and how to best get there, whether in the Congo or in other conflict settings.

As far as the Congo is concerned, Canadian programming includes a component that focuses on democracy promotion, particularly in schools with young people. When we look at situations such as the Congo, six million deaths in the past 20 years or so, a situation that seems to be getting worse before it gets better, I wonder if there might not be a tendency, a fear within Canada, within the international community, in fact, to put democracy on the back seat, on the back burner, if you like.

Instead, if we're going to promote peace in such settings, we focus on economic security, we focus strong security forces and law and order, but I think a lot of the problems that we find in the Congo and in other places like it are the result of a lack of democracy.

Would you agree with the point that has been made by others who have testified at this committee, not in relation to the Congo but in other situations like it, that democracy has to be front and centre, and that the promotion of it has to be front and centre in Canadian foreign policy?

Hon. Roméo Dallaire: When you have imploding nations that are trying to pull themselves out of conflict and get into a reconstituting nation, I am not of the ilk that the first thing you want to do is have democratic elections. What it does is tear everybody apart. There's no consensus there. Everybody is trying to gain power. Be it in Rwanda or be it, as I've seen, in other countries, it's not necessarily the immediate democratic priority. The immediate democratic priority is to educate people on what democracy is.

When I was in Rwanda, the extremist majority could not understand that Jean Chrétien beat Brian Mulroney because Jean Chrétien was from a minority and was elected by a majority. It just could not happen.

With that depth of understanding, the fundamentals of democracy are not there, and the creation of artificial parties—because of power basis, friends, and so on—is divisive. There is a need to reassess whether that is your first priority. I can tell you that when my mandate said I had to bring in a democratic election in two years to a country that had a 100 years of colonial rule, that had 25 years of a dictator, that had three years of a civil war, and that didn't even have a multi-party system, there was no damn way. It only created more stress.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: What you're saying is that the promotion of democracy remains important but it should be undertaken in an educative way?

● (1405)

Hon. Roméo Dallaire: Grassroots build it. Build the nature of it.

With journalism, it's the same thing. Some people were saying we should stop helping journalists in certain countries because we know we teach them the right way but they're getting arrested and they're getting killed, and so on. There will be martyrs. The last thing you should do is to not teach them the right way and not see them being martyrs. How do you think you're going to change the nature of the beast if you're not continuously going at it?

They are volunteering to be journalists. They want to say the right thing, but they're also facing risks because of that. It's up to us to help attenuate those risks, but those risks will exist. The worst thing to do is to back off and say, gee, we're setting them up to be killed. No, you're not. You're setting them up to build the campaign to bring free speech and democracy. That's the way you look at it. It's not for a short term: two or three years. You're looking at it 10 or 15 years down the road. In there, yes, you're going to have casualties on the way.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I see we're now quite a bit after two o'clock. We've had an exceptional discussion this afternoon. Thank you both for joining us and testifying before this committee.

The meeting is adjourned.

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